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SUBJECT: HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS CENTER TO DECENTRALIZE
OPERATIONS; UN AND NGOS ANXIOUS

REF: A. KUWAIT 1061

[1](#)B. KUWAIT 1120

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[1](#)1. (U) Summary and Comment: At an August 2 meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MFA International Organizations Department Director Ambassador Abdullah Murad said that the Humanitarian Operations Center (HOC) offices would be closing down on August 10, but said that the MFA would try to continue the services of the HOC by delegating them to the relevant ministries and agencies throughout Kuwait. He outlined how each specific task previously facilitated by the HOC would now be facilitated by the individual ministries, and assured all those present that the GOK was still committed to the goals of the HOC. United Nations representatives at the meeting expressed strong concern about the decentralization of the HOC's operations and asked, unsuccessfully, that the HOC continue as is until the approval by the National Assembly of an MOU between the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the GOK, expected in October or November. HOC Chief, General (ret) Ali Al-Mumin, said that he would compile a list of all the names and phone numbers of the HOC representatives in each ministry and make that available to the UN and all of the NGOs. Comment: Embassy interventions succeeded in keeping the HOC open far longer than intended by the GOK. At this time, we judge that additional efforts would not be successful and we will press for prompt approval of the UNAMI MOU. End Summary and Comment.

MFA Commits to Keeping HOC Services Going

[1](#)2. (U) Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs International Organizations (I/O) Department Ambassador Abdullah Murad hosted a meeting August 2 to discuss the future operations of the Humanitarian Operations Center (Ref A). Present at the meeting were Embassy Officers, U.S. military personnel detailed to the HOC and from CFLCC, UN personnel, HOC Chief General (ret) Ali Al-Mumin, and other MFA I/O personnel. Murad opened the meeting by saying that the current physical HOC location would be closed down but that the MFA would "try to keep all of the services going." General Ali said that the MFA had just met August 1 with all of the GOK ministries and agencies involved with the HOC and all had agreed to continue providing the HOC services from within their own organizations. He said that, as of August 10, the HOC would no longer take on any new tasks or responsibilities, and that all services should be requested directly through the relevant ministry.

[1](#)3. (U) General Ali commented on a number of the specific functions in which the HOC has been involved and explained how those functions would continue. He said that, after the HOC location shuts down on August 10, Iraqi returning refugees would still have their transportation facilitated "for a week or two" and then direct transportation would be arranged from the airport to the Abdali border crossing. For health cases, General Ali said that he would like to continue the HOC's work in this regard but that there would be a "snag" on some private patients coming from Iraq to Kuwait for treatment. He said that the Ministry of Health would need to approve each individual case. For Customs, specifically how the NGOs would get Customs exemptions on humanitarian supplies entering Kuwait destined for Iraq, General Ali said that he, an assistant and a liaison officer stationed at the UN compound would all have the authority to sign an exemption from Customs duties. He said that the Kuwait Customs Agency did not want to take the responsibility themselves on this matter.

[1](#)4. (U) General Ali added that he would send a form to all HOC participating ministries and ask each one to provide the name and contact information for those responsible for continuing the HOC functions within each ministry. He said that a list of qualified NGOs would also be distributed to

all ministries. Econ Officer encouraged them to do this as soon as possible, preferably before the August 10 cut-off date.

UN Not Happy, Needs MOU Approved

15. (U) UN Resident Coordinator Moez Doraid thanked the GOK and the MFA specifically for all of its support for the HOC and the UN, and voiced the UN's desire to see the HOC continue to operate "as is." He explained that UNAMI is still waiting for its own MOU to be ratified and, in the absence of a UNAMI MOU with the GOK, the HOC continued to serve a critical function. He welcomed a HOC liaison officer in the UN compound, but asked if it would still be possible for the UN and NGOs to have one physical focal point to go to for all of their needs. He repeatedly asked if there was any way to keep the HOC functioning exactly as is until the UNAMI MOU is approved by the National Assembly. MFA I/O Director Murad made it clear that this would not be an option, as far as he was concerned, and that the two issues could not be linked.

16. (U) Murad again emphasized that each ministry would provide the necessary HOC services and that he and General Ali would take responsibility for this. When U.S. Army Col. Carlos Trejo explained how critical the HOC has been to health functions, Murad said that the MFA was "simply dividing up the work" and moving offices and not closing down the HOC. UN officials again pushed for continuation of the HOC as is and were told that it was not possible and that everyone needs to trust the MFA to handle this transition. He said that the MFA "will always find a solution." Col. Trejo explained that the U.S. military and CFLCC would do what they could to continue to support the HOC but support and services would almost certainly not be available as they had been previously.

Confusion Reigns Among HOC Staff

17. (U) Political Officer met August 6 with Lt. Col. Price and Col. Trejo to discuss the HOC closure in further detail. According to the two American officers, the HOC's operations will cease on August 10th and the building with all offices and support personnel will shut down on August 30th. General Ali will take no more than three personnel with him to his office in Shuwaikh. Coalition personnel (i.e. uniformed officers and NCOs) will no longer be required and General Ali himself told Col. Trejo that he would make no effort to prolong their stay. In addition, the GOK is to designate a Liaison Officer to UNAMI to assist with the additional NGO workload and General Ali's office would put out a list of contacts which will be able to provide support in lieu of the Immigration and Medical officers.

18. (SBU) According to Col. Trejo, General Ali feels strongly that the NGOs need to move over to UNAMI even if UNAMI doesn't share this view. (Note: Col. Trejo met with UNAMI staff last week and reportedly they believed the exact opposite. End Note.) In addition, both officers said that there was confusion amongst the staff at the HOC, with most saying that the HOC is 'ending', 'closing, and 'disbanding', not/not moving to other offices. Finally, Col. Trejo and Lt. Col. Price spoke of the intense dislike that many of the staff had for General Ali and the fact that many refused to follow him to another office, with one retiring and one transferring as soon as possible, in order to ensure that they were not called upon to share a workspace with him again. The animosity is so intense that one secretary took off her shoe to demonstrate what she thought of the former Chief of Staff. General Ali will retain control of the \$5 million designated for Najaf and is still in the running for Kuwaiti Ambassador to Iraq, although another candidate has also been identified, according to Lt. Col. Price.

19. (U) Basrah minimize considered.

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